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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - SEPTEMBER 21: IDP CAMPS
EMPTYING

¶1. (U) The information contained in this report consists principally of spot reports from various sources. This cable is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained herein be confirmed at this time.

IDP Camps Almost Empty

¶2. (SBU) UNHCR reported that most of North Kivu's IDP camps continue to empty as IDPs return to their home areas. Bulengo, Buhimba, Kibabti I, and Kibati II are completely empty. Most of the residents of Mugunga I camp, which was approximately 60% full on September 18, have also departed over the last two days.

¶3. (SBU) IDPs from Mugunga II camp have not yet started returning. Camp residents told us that they were waiting to be registered by UNHCR, as the UN agency apparently told them that only registered IDPs would be eligible for assistance once they returned (Note: It is not clear what will happen to IDPs who spontaneously returned before the UNHCR certificate system was in place. Also uncertain is whether IDPs, who were with host families, will also receive assistance. End note).

¶4. (SBU) IDPs in some smaller camps appear to have remained. IDPs from the CCLK camp, which UNHCR does not administer, have not moved. According to UNHCR, Mugunga II has increased its capacity by approximately 1,000 to 5,000 (Comment: As there have been few new huts constructed, this increase is questionable, unless new IDPs have moved in with existing IDPs. End comment).

¶5. (SBU) There are several possible explanations why the IDPs have decided to return now:

-- Individuals want to return in time for the planting season and the school year, both of which are just starting.

-- Some IDPs fear that large scale returns of Tutsi refugees in Rwanda is imminent, so they want to safeguard their "property," which may have belonged to Tutsis before they occupied it.

-- UNHCR has cut assistance to the camps, and with an estimated 80% of IDPs claiming they want to go home (UNHCR estimate), this is simply a propitious moment.

NGO meeting with Doss

¶6. (SBU) During a recent meeting with SRSR Alan Doss, the NGO community in Goma raised several concerns related to the return of IDPs:

-- Security in the returning areas: NGOs pointed out that the areas

of return are areas considered unsafe by the UN, necessitating MONUC escorts for visits to these areas.

-- Lack of basic infrastructure in the returning areas: There is a significant shortage of schools, health facilities, and water systems in the areas. While many NGOs expressed willingness to provide assistance to returnees, they pointed out that much of their financing is tied to specific areas and conditions, i.e., assistance to IDPs in camps. It is not evident, according to NGOs, whether donors will/can approve of this redirection of assistance.

-- Continued IDP movements in other areas: NGOs noted that, while most of the attention is on returning IDPs, there are new IDP movements from Shabunda, Kabare, and Walungu in South Kivu into North Kivu.

-- Medical NGOs are concerned about a mass movement of IDPs throughout the region at the same moment when Goma is suffering from an outbreak of cholera.

-- Most returnees are heading to areas previously controlled by the CNDP, from whom the overwhelming majority of IDPs originally fled. According to OCHA, CNDP soldiers in the field exist more or less as QAccording to OCHA, CNDP soldiers in the field exist more or less as before with their own command structure and a parallel administration. Humanitarian groups, therefore, stress that MONUC should place even more emphasis on civilian protection, as the IDPs return home.

-- Tensions remain high in most return areas. There are reports of returning Tutsi refugees and families of CNDP combatants occupying homes.

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¶7. (SBU) Doss promised to discuss with donors the possibility of redirecting assistance for IDP camps to returnees. Parallel military and administrative structures were unacceptable, he added, and he would raise this with the GDRC. Doss acknowledged that tensions had increased in many areas, emphasizing that MONUC would remain attentive to civilian protection.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: There are most likely a variety of reasons that are driving the decision by IDPs to return. In many parts of North Kivu, the security situation has improved, but there are, as the NGOs noted, many areas that remain relatively insecure. UNHCR told post that some Congolese Tutsi refugees in Rwanda will almost certainly return by the end of 2009. IDP returns are welcome, but the challenges, as outlined by the NGOs, remain formidable. Chief among these is the never-ending question of land ownership. Coupled with competition between rwandophones and other ethnic groups, the question of land ownership could easily lead to a spike in inter-ethnic tensions, if not handled properly.

Humanitarian situation in Haut Uele and Ituri

¶9. (U) According to Radio Okapi, OCHA has announced that over 500,000 people have fled attacks by the LRA in Haut-Uele and by militia groups in Ituri. Since April, the LRA has carried out approximately 160 attacks on civilians, resulting in 174 deaths and 455 adults kidnapped (OCHA did not state how many children the LRA had kidnapped). In total, there are 340,000 IDPs in the LRA-affected areas, with another 25,000 refugees in South Sudan.

¶10. (U) In Ituri, the number of IDPs has grown from 60,000 to 180,000 over the last year due to fighting between the FARDC and the two rebel militias, the FRPI and the FPJC. The majority of IDPs, according to OCHA, have not received any assistance because of the insecure situation. Responding to calls for increased MONUC presence in Ituri to protect humanitarian deliveries, Deputy SRSG Ross Mountain declared that MONUC would take the necessary measures to reinforce humanitarian activity in the region.

GARVELINK